

Narragansett Indian Tribe

LOCATION AND LAND STATUS

The Narragansett Indian Tribe Reservation is located in southern Rhode Island, north of Block Island near Ninigret Pond. The Tribe owns approximately 2,000 acres of undeveloped lands with very sensitive water resources, which include an EPA designated sole source aquifer and two ponds; Schoolhouse Pond (91 acres) and Deep Pond (18 acres); and 923 acre Atlantic White Cedar wetland on the main Reservation and approximately 500 acre wetland located on the Crandall Property in Westerly, Rhode Island. These areas contain many diverse and sensitive flora/fauna and habitats that require close observation and diligent protection. Along with the Trust property, there are 406 acres of fee lands. Currently, the Tribe has 2,500 tribal members who reside outside of the Reservation.

HISTORY

The Narragansett Indians are descendants of the aboriginal people of present-day Rhode Island. Around 1635, the Narragansett Tribe was comprised of five sub-tribes. Rhode Island founder, Roger Williams, acquired land-use rights to Providence from the Narragansett Sachems (kings). In 1675, English settlers massacred the Narragansetts and confined the survivors to a reservation in southern Rhode Island.

During the 18th century, the colonial government abolished the positions of the five Sachems. Tribal lands were lost to non-Indians through incurred debts. The Tribe clung to 15,000 acres until 1880, when the State of Rhode Island “detrified” them without federal sanction. To date, the Tribe maintains its traditional, formal, Tribal Government; recognizing Sachems, Medicine men, women and Tribal Council.

In December 1934, the Narragansett Tribe of Indians incorporated under the Indian Reorganization Act. With Federal Recognition, the Narragansett Indian Tribe was finally able to work towards economic self-sufficiency and cultural revitalization. A Longhouse was constructed in the 1940s to provide a meeting place for tribal members.

In 1975, the Tribe filed suit against the State of Rhode Island and several landowners for return of approximately 3,200 acres of former reservation lands. In 1983, the Tribe received federal recognition and acknowledgment from the Federal Government. The Tribe eventually received 1,800 acres in an out of court settlement. This land was placed in Federal Trust in 1987.

GOVERNING BODY

The principal governing body is composed of a Chief Sachem, Medicine Man, Tribal Secretary, Tribal Treasurer, and a nine-member Council. Enrolled tribal members elect this governing body. In addition, the Tribal Government includes several regulatory and oversight boards. These are the Land & Water Resource Commission, Anthropological & Archaeological Commission, Police Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Economic & Development Commission, Child Board, Council of Elders, Election Committee, and Permitting Board.

Also, the Tribal Government includes several departments, which are the Education, Finance, Economic Development/Planning, Environmental/Natural Resources, Health and Human Services, Housing, Law Enforcement, Personnel, and Social Services.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Potential environmental problems which threaten the Reservation are potential water pollution

of both surface and ground water sources, incremental non-point source pollution from surrounding residential development and Tribal development, long range air pollution, hazardous waste, polluted run-off from highways bordering Tribal lands, illegal dumping, lead paint, presence of Radon indoors and biological and chemical contamination of drinking water.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

The Tribe's long-term goal is to protect Tribal lands and natural resources for future generations. This can only be accomplished by building Tribal capacity and working closely with partners.

The Tribe's land-use planning is based on the 1986 Land-Use Plan and subsequent Zoning and Development Review Ordinances coupled with a Comprehensive Plan that is currently under revision. The Land-Use Plan is based on a land capacity analysis and combined with Tribal adopted Drinking Water Ordinances and ISDS Standards. The plan establishes procedures to protect environmentally sensitive lands, watersheds, flora, fauna and groundwater. The Forest and Water Quality Management Plan also incorporate environmental protection in their formulation.

Current environmental programs include Water Quality protection established in 1990. Monitoring for baseline data began in coordination with the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch Program. Weekly monitoring of surface waters are conducted within the boundaries of the reservation.

The Safe Drinking Water program began in 1995. In 1989, the Tribe passed its own Drinking Water Regulations. Testing includes nitrates, bacteria, lead, radon and copper.

The Wetland Protection Program was established in 1994. The Natural Resources department formulated a long-term approach to the protection of its critical wetland resources. Over the last several years, the Tribe has conducted wetland boundary delineation, compiled an inventory of the flora and fauna found, and conducted wetland bird survey. Information is needed on the water quality and flow/drainage patterns. Other activities under this program include vernal pool studies and road repair activities in areas where storm-water runoff impacts wetlands.

The Environmental Enforcement Program began in 1999. The Tribe is currently developing Environmental Protection plan, environmental laws, hunting and fishing regulations; with traditional and cultural aspects.

The Geographic Information Systems Program began in 2000. GIS work is focused on mapping reservation boundaries and all aspects of natural resources and land use on the Reservation. The GIS Mapping Specialist works closely with the Natural Resources and Planning departments.

The Radon Program a joint endeavor of the Natural Resources Department and the Narragansett Indian Health Department. To ensure the health care needs of the Narragansett community, the two Departments will monitor and evaluate radon levels in Tribal homes and public facilities for air quality. The goal is to establish baseline data for the purposes of remediation.

The Environmental Education program was developed in 1999 to facilitate education of Tribal members and promote community-based environmental protection and cultural awareness.

The Lead Program is under the director of the Adult Vocational Training Director. The program was established to provide Lead Inspector training to Tribal members. Other activities associated with this program include the Little Moccasins yearly workshop, which highlights lead poisoning prevention education for parents and children, and evaluation of lead-based paint hazards in Tribal homes.

The Hazard Mitigation Program assembled a hazard mitigation team in 1992. The team is made up of the Tribal Emergency Response Commission, Natural Resources Department, Real Estates/Rights Protection Department, Housing Department, Indian Health Services, Social Services and the Planning Department. Major hazards for the Tribe are extreme weather events-hurricanes, severe winter storms, blizzards, ice storms, tornadoes, hail and summer droughts.